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ABSTRACT

Much has been said and written about the "conflict" between professional research and teaching. The claim is often made that the two fields of endeavor should complement each other since research can enliven and update a professor's teaching. Little attention has been directed to the converse, the possibility that a professor's teaching can definitely enhance his/her research and consequent publication output. One veteran speech communication professor finds that his classroom experience has led directly to publication output. Student input or questions has led to research (on stage fright, humor, the content of a basic speech course, for example) motivated by real, immediate curiosity; later this research was used as the basis for journal articles or conference papers. A constant complaint among faculty is that heavy teaching loads take up time that could be used for research, but teaching can also enrich and diversify an instructor's list of publications. (TB)

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THE TEACHING/RESEARCH SYMBIOSIS: A TWO-WAY STREET

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Paper, Southern States Communication, April, 1995, New Orleans

Much has been said and written about the "conflict" between professional research and teaching. The claim is often made that the two fields of endeavor should complement one another, since a professor's research can enliven and update his/her teaching. Little of this attention has been directed to the converse, the possibility that one's teaching can definitely enhance one's research and consequent publication output.

Perhaps it is because of our particular field, speech communication, or the particular courses I have taught, I have found that classroom experience has led very directly to scholarly output. Besides authoring or co-authoring four public speaking texts in various editions, I have found classroom impetus for a number of projects which have resulted in publications and convention papers.

Back in my "salad days" while teaching at a small liberal arts college, I empathized with my speech students wrestling with the universal malady of "stage fright." I relayed to them the research results which indicate that, for most, the fear reactions tend to diminish with repeated successful experience at speaking. But they did not always seem to believe me, so I began anonymously collecting data from my students as they exited their final exam.

Data thus collected over several semesters revealed that most students did report diminished fear at the end of the semester; further, they related that the component of the speech course they found most threatening was the judgment, not of their instructor, but of their peers. (See "A Further Note of Speech Fright," The Speech Teacher, 13. Sept., 1964, 223-4.)

This was the purest research I have yet done, since it was solely for my own satisfaction!

A couple of years later, while working on the Ph.D. at Ohio State, I was assigned a term paper for Dr. Franklin H. Knower's seminar. He suggested gathering or using original data, if possible. When I asked if my two-year-old data on stage fright from St. Lawrence University was eligible, he enthusiastically agreed. So my stage fright data became the basis for a successful school paper and, a year later, was published. Knower had urged me to submit it.

Discussion with a fellow colleague at the University of Nebraska over whether our fundamentals course actually improved students' ability at listening and organization led to a study of those variables and a convention paper and an article in a

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regional journal.[1] Collaboration with two other colleagues at other schools led to collection of data on whether student spoken language really differed from their written language; a series of four journal articles and as many convention papers resulted.[2]

Concern over the content nationwide of the basic speech course motivated several colleagues and myself, all members of our SCA's then-named Undergraduate Instruction Interest Group, to launch a series of national mail surveys. These surveys, sponsored by our national office, resulted in a major publication (and a report at our national convention) every five years for 20 years.[3]

How to fairly, reliably and "objectively" grade speeches (and then convince students that those grades were fair, reliable and objective) was an early concern of mine. After some experience using "behavioral objectives" based upon supposed audience effects as my grading criteria, I decided to find if there were any kind of consensus among the profession that these objectives, or criteria, were the ones that could/should be used.

With a grant from the University of Nebraska Research Council, I did a nationwide mail survey, which mostly confirmed my hypotheses and resulted in another national journal publication, reprinted later in several other educational sources.[4] Other work along these lines produced empirical data that showed that grades of actual classroom speeches based on these criteria correlated significantly with actual attitude

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[1]See John H. Thurber and Charles R. Gruner, "The Impact of Listening Skill and Organizaational Skill of a course in Speech Fundamentals," Paper delivered at the Central States Speech Association Conference, April 15, 1966, Chicago; and Gordon L. Thomas, John H. Thurber, and Charles R. Gruner, "Effects of Previous Speech Training on Achievement inthe College Course in Public Speaking," The Speech Teacher 14, November, 1965, 327-30.

[2]For example, Charles R. Gruner, Robert J. Kibler, and James W. Gibson, "A Quantitative Analysis of Selected Characteristics of Oral and Written Vocabularies," The Journal of Communication, 17, June, 1967, 152-58.

[3]The first of these publications was James W. Gibson, Charles R. Gruner, William D. Brooks, and Charles R. Petrie, Jr., "The First Course in Speech: A Survey of Colleges and Universties," The Speech Teacher, 19, January, 1970, 13-20.

[4]Charles R. Gruner, "Behavioral Objectives Expected by Speech Teachers for the Grading of Classroom Speeches," The Speech Teacher, 17, September, 1968, 207-9.

shifts in audiences (and became the basis for published studies and convention papers).[5]

Some of my publications merely report of my fellow teachers' successful teaching techniques I have developed or adapted from others. An assignment I developed to require speech students to develop an experiential familiarity with the major features of the UGA library appeared in The Speech Teacher (now Communication Education); a lecture I developed for public speaking students became a "pop" article, "Snappy Sources Shape Spicy Speeches" in The Toastmaster; my teaching of "E-prime" (using English without any form of the verb "to be") in general semantics lessons prompted me to write several articles on the technique for the international journal of general semantics, Etc.,[6] as well as a public speaking textbook using no is's, are's, was's, etc.;[7] my experience in redesigning my course in parliamentary procedure (SPC 240) led to a how-to article in the Parliamentary Journal.[8]

And when I lectured on the how's and why's of using humor (my major research interest) in public speaking, the occasional student question of "What happens if you don't get laughs?" kept coming up. Having to reply all too often that "Research on the question has not been done", I finally put the problem to empirical testing. Both articles (in psychology journals) point to the fact that laughs do more for you than no laughs.[9]

A constant complaint I hear from colleagues is that research time and effort is lost due to "heavy teaching loads" (but then, isn't teaching most of what we get paid for?) My teaching over the years undoubtedly has taken up time and energy that could

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[5]Such as Charles R. Gruner, Marsha W. Gruner, and Donald O. Olson, "Is Classroom Evaluation Related to Actual Effectiveness of Classroom Speeches?" Southern Speech Journal, 24, Fall, 1968, 36-46.

[6]Such as Charles R. Gruner, "Comments on and a Public Speaking Text in E-Prime," ETC., 50, Fall, 1993, 336-342.

[7]Charles R. Gruner, Essentials of Public Speaking (San Diego: Collegiate Press, 1993). Teacher's Manual to accompany.

[8]"Parliamentary Procedure as the Major Part of a Course in Problem-Solving," PJ, 35, January, 1994, 31-34.

[9]Charles R. Gruner, "Audience's Response to Jokes in Speeches With and Without Recorded Laughs, Psychological Reports, 73, 1993, 347-350; Charles R. Gruner, Laura J. Pelletier, & Melanie A. Williams, "Evaluative Responses to Jokes in Informative Speech With and Without Laughter by an Audience: A Partial Replication," Psychological Reports, 74, 1994, 446.

have been spent in research; but the experience of teaching has also enriched and diversified my list of publications and convention papers. Also: I can only hope that my output has been of some assistance to others teaching in the discipline of speech communication.